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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 08 YAOUNDE 000227

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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS TO PRESIDENT BIYA

REF: A. 06 YAOUNDE 440

[1](#)B. 06 YAOUNDE 191

[1](#)C. YAOUNDE 174

[1](#)D. YAOUNDE 193

Classified By: Ambassador Niels Marquardt, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) President Biya's 74th birthday (February 13, 2007) revived speculation about who might succeed him, especially if were not to complete his term in office (which ends in 2011). The latest round of succession talk began last year following his spring 2006 illness (Ref. A), and his finally surpassing his sole predecessor in length of service (24 years, and counting). Though no one is willing to put himself forward as a possible successor or -- aside from certain opposition politicians -- even admit openly to presidential aspirations, there is a short list of popular favorites whom we profile here. While this cable is not meant to predict a successor or to weigh the chances of the various individuals seen here as possible contenders, we nevertheless have grouped the individuals into loose categories reflecting where they stand today. In Cameroon's complicated political system and society, far more than qualifications will influence the selection of the next president. Septel will report on the political context in which the 2011 elections will take place, and should be seen as a companion piece to this essentially biographic report.

Immediate Constitutional Successor:
Djibril CAVAYE YEGUIE

[1](#)2. (U) Should President Biya resign, die in office, or be found incompetent to perform his duties, his temporary constitutional successor would be the President (Speaker) of the National Assembly whose term would last 40 days until new Presidential elections are held. (In reality, 40 days would not be sufficient and this interim period would have to be extended.) He is constitutionally ineligible to run as the permanent successor. (Note: Ref. B details the mechanics of the constitutional succession).

[1](#)3. (U) Djibril CAVAYE YEGUIE, President of the National Assembly, is a native of the Far North Province. A physical education teacher by training, he was a civil servant for

several years before entering politics in the early 1970s. He served in Parliament from 1973-1978 and 1983-1988. He did not run in 1988 but was elected again in 1992, facing challengers from other parties for the first time. CAVAYE YEGUIE was elected President of the National Assembly on March 31, 1992 and has been re-elected every year since then.

¶4. (C) A member of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), CAVAYE YEGUIE is not a particularly charismatic figure and is seen as a political lightweight easily manipulated by the Presidency. Some in his party even question his repeated re-election as National Assembly President. Nevertheless, he is an asset to the party in the populous and thus politically important Far North Province -- where Biya and the CPDM are strong -- and he enjoys President Biya's confidence. A Muslim, CAVAYE YEGUIE is married with children.

¶I. THE CLEAN, COMPETENT AND WELL-POSITIONED

Prime Minister Ephraim INONI

¶5. (SBU) A relatively successful Prime Minister who expresses no personal political ambition other than to serve his president well, Ephraim INONI's competence has made him in the eyes of many an obvious possible successor to President Biya, although public opinion generally does not give any Anglophone much chance at this time.

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¶6. (U) A native of the South West Province, INONI was born August 16, 1947. Prior to joining the government he was a primary school teacher. INONI is a Treasury Inspector trained at the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) in 1977; he also holds a master's degree from Southeastern University in Washington, DC (1982-1984). A member of the CPDM, INONI is married with four children; an Anglophone, he is also fluent in French; indeed, he governs almost exclusively in French.

¶7. (U) Prior to his appointment as PM on December 8, 2004, INONI served for 12 years as Deputy Secretary General of the Presidency, where a key responsibility was the national program of bilingualism. He also was the GRC point person on Bakassi and some speculate that his appointment as PM was a reward for the ICJ ruling in Cameroon's favor. From 1982-1992 INONI held a series of finance, budget, salary and treasury positions throughout Cameroon and in the Embassy in Washington. He has served on several boards and gave up his position of Chairman of the Board of Administrators of Standard Chartered Bank, Cameroon when he became Prime Minister.

¶8. (U) When he came to the Prime Minister's office, some wondered if INONI would be strong enough to exert a firm grip over the Cabinet, especially in the face of strong, independent and politically well-connected ministers like his powerful former boss (until September 22, 2006, when he was appointed Foreign Minister) Presidential Secretary General ATANGANA MEBARA. (Other former bosses who now work -- at least nominally -- for INONI include Interior Minister MARAFA, PTT Minister BELLO Bouba, and Vice Prime Minister Amadou ALI.) In his two years on the job, INONI has established himself as a reasonably strong and effective leader with generally good control over most of Biya's Ministers; however, his power is derived entirely from Biya's and he has no political base of his own. He has achieved impressive results in helping Cameroon reach the HIPC completion point, in combatting corruption and revamping the civil service.

MARAFA HAMIDOU YAYA
Minister of Territorial Administration
and Decentralization

¶9. (C) A dynamic, personable and energetic man, MARAFA HAMIDOU YAYA has an excellent relationship with the U.S. Embassy -- as well as the French, Japanese, British, and others. Like PM INONI, MARAFA's intelligence and effectiveness have raised his national profile and make him a possible presidential candidate -- perhaps even the front-runner. He is the sole Cameroonian to have admitted, albeit privately, to the Ambassador that he harbors that ambition. He is also the likely preference of every Western Ambassador in town, including this one. MARAFA's current responsibilities include organizing the 2007 legislative elections and pushing for improved security in Cameroon. His personality, competence, and bilingualism also make him a point person of choice to carry important messages abroad for Biya.

¶10. (SBU) MARAFA was born in 1952 in the North Province. A U.S.-trained petroleum engineer (University of Kansas, 1980), MARAFA also holds a BA in Geology from the University of Yaounde (1976). A (not very devout) Muslim, MARAFA is a senior member of the CPDM, fluent in both English and French and married to a woman from Douala, with (adopted) children. His marriage -- to a non-Muslim not from his region -- is unpopular at home in Garoua, which means he has a better national base of power than he does in his home town -- something unusual for a Cameroonian politician.

¶11. (U) Before entering government, MARAFA worked for the National Hydrocarbons Company (SNH) where he served as head of the Exploration and Production Department (1981-1990) and as Technical Adviser in charge of relations with the IMF and World Bank (1990-1992). In November 1992, MARAFA joined the Ministry of Finance. He was appointed Special Adviser to the

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President in 1995, Secretary General at the Presidency in 1997, Minister of State and Secretary General in 2001. Biya jailed MARAFA for several years after the 1984 coup attempt, although there was no evidence against him, but the two have obviously reconciled and Biya relies on MARAFA for advice on many key issues.

¶12. (SBU) MARAFA became Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) in October 2002 when legislative and municipal elections were postponed due to poor organization. President Biya needed someone he could trust and MARAFA has proved his reliability within a sensitive ministry. MARAFA has worked hard to instill a sense of national (vice provincial) loyalty among MINATD employees and is the first Minister of Territorial Administration to conduct a national tour to educate Cameroonians about the importance of elections and encouraging voter registration. He is widely seen as having improved election organization and since February 2006 has begun work on decentralization which is needed badly in Cameroon.

Amadou ALI
Vice Prime Minister and
Minister of Justice

¶13. (C) Depending on the prosecution of the country's anti-corruption campaign, Amadou ALI could ride a tide of popular support into higher office. At the same time, however, he is making numerous, important enemies. As Minister of Justice, ALI has a solid reputation for competence and integrity. A garrulous but unassuming man,

ALI gives no indications of presidential aspirations, though his impeccable reputation might make him a popular choice of people fed up with corrupt government officials and looking for a transitional figure they can trust. Biya obviously trusts him with the most sensitive work now under way in Cameroon. His main weaknesses are what is described as a "poor education" and his lack of English -- though neither seem to have hampered him in tough jobs. He is among the most accessible Ministers to this Embassy, and most others, and is regularly seen at diplomatic events. His current wife is a medical doctor and they have one son together. His first marriage, arranged when he was very young, produced daughters who are 30 years older than his teenage son.

¶14. (U) A native of the Far North province, ALI was born in 1943. He is a devout Muslim, speaks French fluently and understands some (but never speaks) English. He trained as a civil administrator at ENAM (1971) and has a diploma from the International Institute for Public Administration in Paris (1970). ALI has been in government continuously since 1985 and has served in a number of ministries, including Interior, Defense, and the National Gendarmerie. He served as Secretary General at the Presidency (1996-7) and has been Justice Minister since 2001 (and concurrently Vice Prime Minister since 2004). ALI represented Cameroon before the International Court of Justice in the dispute with Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula and is still the head of Cameroon's delegation to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission.

Laurent ESSO
Secretary General at the Presidency

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¶15. (C) Laurent ESSO is another of Cameroon's quietly competent senior officials with a clean reputation, who seems to enjoy the president's full confidence and whom many believe is the one to watch. Indeed, he seems to be made almost exactly in Biya's own quiet mold, and it would be surprising -- in exactly the same way as it was with Biya in 1982 -- to see him assume power. As Foreign Minister (2004-2006) and as Defense Minister before that, ESSO was distant, in part because he so often represented the President at summit meetings and other international events; however, his personality is cold and distance comes naturally

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to him with both foreigners and Cameroonians. He seldom met with Ambassadors, even when in town. His move to the presidency as Secretary General in the September 22, 2006 cabinet re-shuffle was seen as a sign of Biya's confidence in him. Perhaps too reserved to be seen as a presidential contender, he nonetheless has the experience and integrity that could make him an attractive compromise candidate. As neither a Northern Peuhl nor a Southern Beti, he represents an option that could break a deadlock.

¶16. (U) ESSO was born on August 10, 1942 in Douala. He received a BA in Law and Economics from the University of Yaounde on 1969 and graduated as a lawyer at the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM). He is a native French speaker, has a good knowledge of English but is hesitant to speak it. ESSO joined the government in 1982 and served in various functions at the presidency until 1996, save a three year stint as Chancellor of the University of Yaounde (1985-1988). In September 1996, ESSO was appointed Minister of Justice; he moved to Health in 2000, to Defense in 2001 and to External Relations in 2004. In every position he was responsible for promoting quiet but positive change. He is easily the most discreet member of Biya's inner circle.

II. THE CORRUPT AND POWERFUL

Jean-Marie ATANGANA MEBARA
Minister of Foreign Affairs

¶17. (C) Though viewed by some as a possible successor to Biya, MEBARA is also rumored to be one of the more corrupt officials in the government. This is perhaps why he was removed from his post as Secretary General at the Presidency in the September 2006 cabinet reshuffle and sent to the Ministry of External Relations where, presumably, there will be fewer opportunities to profit from his position. His power base is now severely truncated and the reshuffle also removed from government many of his closest Beti collaborators. Should he be sanctioned for corruption it would reduce greatly his chances of winning the presidency, but not necessarily remove him from contention altogether. There are growing rumors, however, that MEBARA could be among those about to lose their government jobs. (Ref. C) Allegations of corruption against MEBARA include getting his hands into business deals that had to pass through the Presidency for approval (most notably the "Albatross" whereby the GRC paid for a Presidential aircraft which Biya found unacceptable after only one hair-raising trip, and was then unable to recover the funds paid for it), collecting large sums from people in exchange for ministerial appointments, and generally screening and filtering critical information from reaching Biya.

¶18. (U) A native of the Center Province, MEBARA was born in Yaounde in 1954. He received his BA from the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences at the University of Yaounde in 1977 and immediately entered public service. He left in 1978 for France where he continued his studies, culminating with a doctorate in Educational Economics in 1984. Since then, he has worked in several ministries (including serving as Minister for Higher Education), the PM's office and the Presidency. In August 2002, he succeeded MARAFA as Secretary General at the Presidency, a position he held until being appointed Minister of External Relations in September 2006. MEBARA is charming and speaks fluent English as well as French.

Polycarpe ABAH ABAH
Minister of Economy and Finance

¶19. (C) Unctuous and notoriously corrupt, Polycarpe ABAH ABAH is also rich and powerful, leading some to suppose he has escaped dismissal and arrest only because there are greater concerns about the forces he could marshal if ousted.

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Amadou ALI has told the Ambassador that he is currently investigating ABAH ABAH for alleged embezzlement in excess of USD 200 million. The Prime Minister and Interior Minister each recently told the Ambassador that Abah Abah recently paid USD 30,000 to each of the Members of Parliament from his native South Province, for undisclosed services rendered.

¶20. (C) Abah Abah is strongly rumored to have an enormous network of personal business interests that trump the national interest regularly. For example, he is said to have a personal stake in the company to which he provisionally awarded the Camair privatization contract, which remains unsettled as he and the Prime Minister wrestle for control of this sensitive file. While we have reason to believe that his days as Minister of Economy and Finance could be numbered (Ref. C), some fear that ABAH ABAH could stage -- or at least finance -- a coup if President Biya were to die before ABAH ABAH lands in jail. The extent of his abuse of office, particularly as Director of Taxation, is so widely suspected, however, that many fear popular unrest could break out if

ABAH ABAH ascends to new political heights. He is seen by most Cameroonians as a living, prospering symbol of all that is wrong here, and the fact that he survived the September reshuffle remains a source of anger and disbelief among both diplomats and everyday Cameroonians.

¶21. (U) Born in 1954, Polycarpe ABAH ABAH earned a BA in Economics from the University of Yaounde and a Masters in Administration from the University of South Carolina (paid for by a USAID scholarship). An eloquent Francophone, he is also fully fluent in English. He trained as a tax inspector and at ENAM. A member of the ruling CPDM, ABAH ABAH was appointed Minister of Economy and Finance in December 2004. Competent in his official capacity, ABAH ABAH is credited with leading Cameroon to the HIPC Completion Point (April 2006).

III. DARK HORSES

Gregoire OWONA
Minister Delegate at the Presidency

¶22. (U) A native of the Center province, Gregoire OWONO was born in 1950. He has served as Minister Delegate at the Presidency in Charge of Relations with the Assemblies (the National Assembly, or Parliament, and when the 1996 Constitution is fully implemented, the Senate) since December ¶1997. A member of the ruling CPDM, Owona is the Deputy Secretary General of the party's central committee -- a

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position in which his influence is limited by his notoriously bad relations with ailing CPDM Secretary General Charles DOUMBA. OWONA is a computer specialist and ran a private computer software business before joining government.

¶23. (U) As a possible presidential contender, OWONA is appealing for being a moderate and a reformer within the CPDM and for his openness to dialogue, a trait that has enhanced his effectiveness in dealing with the parliamentary opposition. OWONA is Vice Chairman of the National Commission on Human Rights and was an International Visitor in 1989.

Maurice KAMTO
Minister Delegate to the
Minister of Justice

¶24. (SBU) If there is a Barack Obama in Cameroon, it might very well be Maurice KAMTO, a French-educated International Law scholar and a prominent member of Cameroonian civil society. Born in 1954 in the West province, KAMTO served as the Dean of the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences at the University of Yaounde II before his appointment to the Cabinet. He has a reputation as a brilliant intellectual with unquestioned personal integrity and strong, progressive ideas on democracy and human rights, views that got him

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jailed in the mid-eighties. KAMTO served as a legal adviser for Cameroon's legal team on the International Court of Justice ruling on the Bakassi dispute, and now serves on the UN International Law Commission. A Francophone, KAMTO also speaks fluent English. He is married to a senior diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who currently is in charge of European Affairs.

IV. OPPOSITION LEADERS

Amadou NDAM NJOYA
Opposition Leader

¶25. (SBU) A native of the West province, Dr. Amadou NDAM NJOYA was born May 8, 1942. He is a French-educated jurist and political scientist, fluent in both English and French. He is chairman of the Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC). Although a career diplomat, NDAM NJOYA has been out of the Foreign Ministry for a long time. Before entering politics, he served as a university professor (1969-72), first director of the International Relations institute of Cameroon (IRIC, 1972-75), Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (1975-77), Minister of National Education (1977-80) and at the Presidency. He was selected as the consensus opposition candidate in the run-up to the 2004 Presidential election, having fulfilled the criteria as the most likely person seriously to challenge Paul Biya, but the agreement fell apart when John FRU NDI of the SDF decided to maintain his own candidacy. He has been called "the best President Cameroon will never have."

Bernard "Ben" MUNA
Opposition Faction Leader

¶26. (U) "Ben" MUNA belongs to one of Cameroon's most prominent families. A bilingual Anglophone from the North West province, MUNA has a legal background and is a faction leader of the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF). Despite his prominent role in the SDF, MUNA also enjoys support among members of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). MUNA's law firm, probably the best known in Cameroon, owes much of its success to the family's connections and access to high levels of government. As a result, Ben MUNA has been able to maintain good professional relations with people throughout government, despite his role as an opposition figure.

¶27. (U) 67 years old, MUNA studied law in England (1959-1966) and registered with the London Bar in May 1966. He held several jobs in provincial courts in Cameroon from August 1966-1970 before leaving to form his own law firm. In 1974 he moved to Yaounde, rising to prominence in the legal community and eventually being elected Chairman of the Cameroon Bar Association in 1986. When the multiparty system was established in December 1990, MUNA became an early member of the Social Democratic Front, but was unsuccessful in his attempt to become the party's presidential candidate in 1992. In 2006 he again challenged the existing party leadership, which has, for all intents and purposes, split the SDF into two rival and, for the moment, irreconcilable factions.

John FRU NDI
Opposition Leader

¶28. (C) Ironically, Cameroon's most prominent and electorally successful opposition leader, Social Democratic Front Chairman John FRU NDI, is the one perennial candidate most people have already written off. FRU NDI's very public rift with Ben Muna over leadership of the SDF has painted FRU NDI as a divider rather than a unifier -- as did his selfish behavior before the 2004 election (when he reneged on a deal

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that would have made NDAM NJOYA the consensus opposition candidate). With 22 seats in Parliament, albeit down from 43 in 1997, the SDF is still the leading opposition party by a wide margin. Nevertheless, the SDF has been unable or unwilling to transform itself from the leading opposition party to the leader of the opposition parties. In 1992, when

FRU NDI won 36 percent of the ballots to Biya's 40 percent (according to official results, which FRU NDI still challenges), he was a real contender. Since then, however, his national appeal has eroded considerably. Those who might have seen the SDF as the opposition's hope for winning the presidency in 2011 now are more inclined to blame the SDF for its total disarray and for handing the CPDM an easy victory.

¶29. (U) A native of the North West Province, John FRU NDI was born in 1941. He studied commerce in Nigeria and worked for several companies there before returning to Cameroon where he has been involved in the book selling business for some years. FRU NDI has been the leader of the Social Democratic Front since 1990. His constituency is concentrated in the Anglophone North West and South West provinces. FRU NDI is the only Presidential candidate in 2004 to have campaigned in all 10 provinces, but he was -- and is -- hampered by a lack of knowledge of French.

¶V. POPULAR OUTSIDERS

¶30. (U) This group of possible candidates might also be called "sentimental favorites," whose electoral chances would be enhanced significantly if sitting ministers do not pursue the presidency. All enjoy broad popularity because of their intellect and proven competence. Henri HOGBE NLEND and Marcel YONDO are not members of current power circles -- something that is an organizational disadvantage but popularly appealing. While it is not clear that Cameroon is ready for a female president, 2011 is four years away and Aissatou YAOU is the one woman in Cameroon with the proven record in government (not to mention strong ruling party credentials) and broad-based appeal to launch a credible campaign. If popular sentiment in 2011 Cameroon is to "throw the bums out," these outsiders could be suddenly well-positioned.

Henri HOGBE NLEND
Former Minister of Finance

¶31. (U) A member of the opposition UPC (Union of the Peoples of Cameroon), Henri HOGBE NLEND was in government until 2002. He was an unsuccessful presidential candidate in 1997, garnering 2 percent of the vote, but was named Minister of Scientific and Technical Research in December 1997. Well liked and respected at the time, some believe that he was removed because he was so popular; he did not run for president in 2004 because of strong competition within the UPC. A long-time expatriate, HOGBE NLEND, the first Cameroonian to earn a doctorate in mathematics, was a professor of mathematics for 23 years at the University of Bordeaux. A native of the Littoral province, HOGBE NLEND is in his late 60s.

Edouard AKAME MFOUMOU
Former Minister of Finance

¶32. (U) A native of the South province, Edouard AKAME MFOUMOU, was born on August 14, 1945. He holds a BA in Law from the University of Yaounde (1969), trained at ENAM, is a member of the CPDM and remains active in the party. AKAME MFOUMOU served as Minister of Economy and Finance from September 1996-April 2001. He was judged to be competent and had good relations with the IMF and World Bank. He was an early champion of anti-corruption by ending the practice within his ministry of making contractors turn over 30 percent of their bills in order to have their vouchers paid. Several months before he left office, supporters circulated

"Akame for President" flyers in Yaounde and Douala, prompting some to speculate that his popularity led to his removal.

Marcel YONDO
Former Minister of Finance

¶33. (SBU) Marcel YONDO served as Minister of Finance under Ahidjo. He is the president of the Movement for the Liberation and Development of Cameroon (MLDC) and was active in politics in the 1990s, even running for President in 1997, and garnering more than 1 percent of the vote. Apparently a man before his time, YONDO did not run for president in 2004 because he favored uniting the opposition behind a single candidate, an approach that failed. He has remained active in a range of gatherings that bring together prominent opposition leaders and intellectuals. Cognizant of his intellectual capabilities, YONDO has been described as seeing himself in a class above the rest, a view that could alienate potential supporters.

¶34. (U) A native of the Littoral Province, YONDO was born on July 23, 1937. He studied in France, earning a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Grenoble. Returning to Cameroon after his studies in 1968, he was named Assistant Director of Salaries at the Ministry of Finance. He moved to the Presidency in 1971 as Technical Adviser for Economic and Financial Affairs. In 1973 he became the National Director of the Bank of Central African States (BEAC), where he remained until 1975 when he was named Minister of Finance, a position he held until 1979.

Aissatou YAOU
General Manager,
National Investment Corporation

¶35. (U) Mme. Aissatou YAOU, currently General Manager of the National Investment Corporation (SNI), has been a trail-blazer among women in Cameroon. Though not known to have personal political ambitions, she is nonetheless the national president of the Women's Organization of the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement. She was the first woman to lead the Ministry of Women's Affairs, she is the second longest serving minister (16 years, 1984-2000). She is responsible for enacting laws that changed the lives of women nation wide, such as abolishing the requirement that wives get permission from their husbands to travel, and has enacted women's empowerment centers throughout Cameroon.

¶36. (U) A Muslim, YAOU was born in Garoua, in the North Province on November 28, 1951. She is a French and U.S.-educated economist, studying at the Universities of Le Mans and Rouen, where she earned a BA in Economics in 1975. In 1979 she earned an MBA from Claremont Graduate school. Returning to Cameroon, she worked at SNI from 1981-1984, before being appointed Minister of Women's Affairs (later Social and Women's Affairs), a position she held until she left government in 2000 and rejoined SNI. In 1986 she was an International Visitor. (Ref. D offers more bio details on Mme. YAOU.)
MARQUARDT